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SIPDIS

FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

FOR DRL/PHD - MICHAEL ORONA

E.O.12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CONGO/B: SUPPORTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND
DEMOCRACY: THE U.S. RECORD (2004-5 REPORT)

REF: 04 STATE 267453

1. As requested in Reftel, here is the 2004-5 report on Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record for the Republic of Congo (Congo/Brazzaville).

2. BEGIN TEXT:

The Republic of Congo is ruled by a government in which most of the decision-making authority is vested directly in the Executive Branch. Denis Sassou-Nguesso was elected President in March 2002, and in May and June of that year legislative elections were held for the Senate and the National Assembly in all jurisdictions, except for the Pool region where most of the 1997-2002 civil war and instability occurred. Both the presidential and legislative elections were determined "not to contradict the will of the people" by independent monitors.

In March 2003 the government signed a peace accord with the rebel forces known as Ninjas of Pasteur Ntumi, and the country has been relatively stable with a fragile calm since then. Uncontrolled and unidentified armed elements have remained active in the Pool region, despite an ongoing demobilization and reintegration (DR) program.

For most of 2004 the Government's human rights record had improved but major challenges and problems still remained. There were reports that security forces were responsible for extrajudicial killings, as well as summary executions, rapes, beatings, physical abuse of detainees and citizens, arbitrary arrest and detention, looting, solicitation of bribes and theft. Prison conditions were poor. The judiciary continued to be overburdened, underfunded, and subject to political influence, bribery and corruption.

Promoting respect for human rights served as the basis for U.S. embassy programs with the government, press and NGOs, and international organizations.

Through civil-military dialogue and military training exchanges sponsored by the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Government encouraged greater military discipline, professionalism, and respect for human rights. A high commission was established in 2002 for the reinsertion of former rebel militia members (some into civil society, some into the military) using World Bank (WB) funds. Some reinsertion programs continued into 2004 under WB funding, and a new DR program began in 2004 under UNDP administration with European Union funding to address the Ninja combatants from the March 2003 accords. The March 2003 peace accords included a commitment from President Sassou that former Ninja militia would receive amnesty if they laid down their arms. In addition, the Embassy continued to support a DOD-funded English-language training program for military officers intended to facilitate other types of training. Medical equipment was provided to Brazzaville civilian hospitals from Excess Defense Articles. DOD Humanitarian Assistance funds were used to provide vocational training for ex-combatants from the Pool region.

To promote worker rights, the U.S. Department of Labor helped fund a two-year regional initiative by the International Labor Organization's International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor with the goal of demobilizing and rehabilitating child soldiers and reintegrating them into their former communities. U.S. Secretary Chao traveled to the region in December 2003 to officially launch the program.

In order to build general awareness of human rights among the population, the Embassy focused its efforts on youth, women and minorities. The Embassy used the Democracy and Human Rights Funds for programs on the rights of key minority groups such as the pygmies and prevention of trafficking in children. Through the

Education for Development and Democracy Initiative (EDDI) and African Education Initiative, the Embassy supported funding of a local NGO to assist with scholarships for girls and girls' HIV/AIDS education. The success of this program resulted in an Appreciation Award of \$143,750 in special additional funding in November 2003. Other grants provided funds for educating the minority pygmy population about their rights and protecting their environment and traditional ways for the next generations; for anti-corruption seminars; for refugee assistance; for job training for women (particularly abused women) and orphans, for food production, sheltering and schools supplies for IDPs in the Pool, and trafficking in persons projects. Grants have amounted to about \$400,000 over three years. To promote good governance, the Mission provided a DHRF grant to a local NGO to conduct seminars on anti-corruption education for regional government officials and administrators. It also organized a Public Diplomacy Speaker Program on anti-corruption for 30 government and NGO officials. Although the Government organized an Anti-Corruption Day in late 2003 and instituted an Anti-Corruption Office reporting directly to the Presidency during 2004, it abolished the Anti-Corruption Office during a reorganization of cabinet ministries in January 2005.

Through demarches, discussions with the government and cooperation with the international community, the Embassy continued to stress the need for the Government to increase transparency in accounting for oil revenues and other public funds. After initial difficulty, the government met minimal requirements for a Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF). However, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stated that the Government still needs to improve accounting and transparency practices, particularly in the oil sector. We agree with the IMF assessment on this issue.

The Embassy sponsored a national conference on preventing the blight on cassava that sought to promote food security by formulating a national policy to combat the diseases and improve production of this staple crop.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture donated excess U.S. agricultural commodities for a program administered by a U.S. NGO that sells them on the local market and uses the revenues to fund micro-finance lending for small business enterprise, expanding the private sector.

END OF TEXT.

13. Brazzaville Embassy Office - Indyke.
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